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THE SEAL OF PORTSMOUTH, R. I. OF 1807.

(recently discovered)

Issued Quarterly

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RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

COLLECTIONS

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H. ANTHONY DYER, *President* GILBERT A. HARRINGTON, *Treasurer*
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Narragansett Bay and Dee River, 1583

By FULMER MOOD

In a recent publication the statement has been made that Sir Humphrey Gilbert's projected colony of Norumbega was to be established on the shores of Narragansett bay. An official document of 1583 is produced, evidencing, it is asserted, that the Elizabethan designation for Narragansett bay was "Dee river." According to the same source, there is to be found along the coast to the westward of Dee river "the ryver of Norumbeage."[1] To test these geographical assertions is the aim of this note.

The technical adviser on whom Gilbert was at this time leaning heavily was John Dee, a Welsh polymath the profundity of whose learning easily merits that doctorate which

[1]William B. Goodwin, "The Dee River of 1583 (Now called Narragansett Bay) and Its Relation to Norumbega," in RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS (Providence, 1934), XXVII (No. 2), pp. 38-50.

hasty writers too frequently bestow upon one whom contemporaries greeted as "Master."[2]

The document of 1583 already mentioned—it is a deed from Gilbert to Sir George Peckham—informs us that the port is called Dee river by Dee himself. That is to say, he was responsible for so naming it. Reading further in the document, we learn more of this river or harbor to which it had pleased the scholar to affix his name: "Dee Ryver which Ryver by the discripcion of John Verarzanus a Florentyne lyeth in Septontrionall latitude about fortye twoo degrees and has his mouth lyinge open to the South halfe a league brode or there aboute and enteringe Within the saide Baye betweene the Easte and the Northe encreaseth his breadith and contynueth twelve leagues or there abouts and then maketh a gulfe of twentie leagues compasse or thereabouts and conteyneth in it selfe five small Islandes newlie named the Cinque Isles."[3]

This description is sufficiently detailed to give rise to a natural inference in the mind of modern students that Gilbert, when he made the grant, and when he so described a portion of the territory he was conveying, based his action upon a map then in his possession. Certainly one can hardly escape the feeling that Gilbert had ready at hand some aid from which he took the particulars concerning the five isles and the run of the shore line, all the descriptions of which he incorporated into his legal instrument. It is a natural inference, to repeat, that the hypothetical source for this is a map. But no time need be lost searching for cartographical evidence bearing on the point, because there is waiting to be brought into the discussion a document which without question is Gilbert's source.

Speaking of an American region on the coast in about

[2]The role of John Dee, a neglected factor in the history of English expansion in late Tudor times, has lately been clarified by E. G. R. Taylor in *Tudor Geography*, 1485-1583 (London, 1930). Prof. Taylor devotes three chapters to Dee's work.

[3]Goodwin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

41° 30′ north latitude a chronicler writes: "[This country] lyeth East and West, I say that the mouth of the hauen lyeth open to the South halfe a league broade, and being entred within it between the East and the North, it stretcheth twelue leagues: where it waxeth broder and broder, and maketh a gulfe about 20. leagues in compasse, wherein are fiue small Islandes very fruitfull and pleasant, full of hie and broade trees, among the which Ilandes, any great Nauie may ryde safe without any feare of tempest or other daunger."[4] These words were written by the author of Verrazano's narrative (who may have been Verrazano himself) and they were in print in English as early as the summer of 1582. The younger Hakluyt had translated Verrazano's narrative and published it in his little book, *Divers Voyages*, a work which was in large part designed as a handbook for the Gilbert venture in colonization. To apply the method of textual comparisons is to certify that the excerpt just given is the source of the description incorporated in the grant to Peckham.

The recognition of this circumstance alters the approach to the solution of the problem concerning the location of Dee's river. If Gilbert had Verrazano's account in his hand, and incorporated that navigator's description of a bay on the Atlantic coast, then the identification of that bay depends upon a scrutiny of Verrazano's narrative. But the identification must be made in accord with certain facts supplied by the grant to Peckham. The most pertinent of these is the information that the river of Norumbega lies to the westward of the Dee river or port.

It is true that Verrazano's narrative describes a large river which lies to the west of his harbor already mentioned. But this river of Verrazano's—in which it is easy to see the

[4]R. Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages* (London, 1582), sig. B_4 verso—sig. B_5 recto. The general term by which Hakluyt describes this part of the coast is "Morum bega." He writes it as two words. He informs the reader, in a marginal note at the top of sig. B_1 recto, of "The Country of Sir H. G. voyage." Verrazano's letter is reprinted in Chapin's *Documentary History of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1919), Vol. 2, Chapter I.

Hudson—bears no name. Gilbert obviously did not derive the name of the river of Norumbega from that source. He must have derived this term, too, from some readily available authority. Why not from his technical adviser? Master John Dee at this time had in his possession a map of North America, and prominently displayed on this map in the central sector of the Atlantic coast is the term "Norumbega."[5] The country of Norumbega, as this map plainly shows, is traversed through the middle by a large river which rises far in the interior. This stream can hardly be anything other than the "river of Norumbega." It may with confidence be taken to be the Hudson. Concerning the several openings and indentations on the coast to the eastward of this river's mouth, no statement need be hazarded except that the shore line which it is intended to represent is undoubtedly the littoral of southern New England.

If then the river of Norumbega as shown on Dee's map and the large river visited by Verrazano just before reaching Narragansett bay are to be understood as one and the same river, and if this may be taken as the Hudson, a vital condition for the identification of Dee's river is satisfied. The legal instrument informs us that west of the harbor of Dee is the river of Norumbega. And Narragansett Bay is certainly in a proper relation to the Hudson, by this construction.

As the present writer reads Verrazano's narrative, he is satisfied that the bay with the five isles in it corresponds to Narragansett bay, and that the river of Norumbega which lies to the west of it is the Hudson.

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[5]British Museum, Manuscript Room: Cottonian MS, Aug. I, i, art. 1. There is a description of this map in *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts, Maps, Charts, and Plans . . .* in the British Museum (London, 1844), I, p. 30. The map has been reproduced, with some loss of its original sharpness of definition, in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (Glasgow, 1904), VIII, facing p. 486.

The Stanton Purchase

By Susan Stanton Brayton*

On August 22, 1662, the Indian Sachem Wannumachon deeded to Robert Stanton and George Gardiner a tract of land five miles long by one and a half miles wide, between the rivers Westototucket and Ashuniunck, or adjoining the Pettaquamscutt Purchase. These rivers are now called Usquepaug and Beaver Rivers, and the land thus deeded, the Stanton Purchase.

In recording the history of this, as of any piece of land, one may resort to several sources for information—topographical, documentary, and traditional—supplementing them by the recollections of the oldest inhabitant.

The road recently improved, Route R. I. 2, called the South County Trail, affords a convenient means of exploring this bit of back country, hitherto known to few. The trail enters the Purchase where it crosses the Usquepaug River into Richmond over a new concrete bridge. It then traverses the Great Plain in a westerly direction; climbs a low hill; swerves to the south; and, skirting Great Swamp, finally reaches the Pawcatuck River at Kenyon.

The two rivers which bound the Purchase on the east and west flow in a general southerly course. The Usquepaug is a sluggish stream, cutting a meandering channel through bogland, and beyond the bridge is lost in the thick growth of Great Swamp; Beaver River on the west, no longer frequented by the beaver builders which gave it its name, flows more swiftly through leafy woodland and sunny

*Authorities have been named except for statements about the Boss Meeting House which were taken from the minutes of the Sunday School Convention.

The author has drawn upon her memory of the locality and the story of its history as related by her mother, also upon Miss Kenyon's reminiscences, and Clarke and Marchant papers.

meadows, luring fishermen by its promise of trout. It drains the valley at the foot of Shannock and School House Hills and, like the Usquepaug, empties into the Pawcatuck. For further exploration one should drive along the old dirt road branching from the trail just beyond the bridge, which leads to the village of Usquepaug; also another old road, forking from the trail and descending the hill into Beaver River valley and the Shannock Purchase beyond.

As to documentary sources, one of great importance has recently come into the possession of the Rhode Island Historical Society through the gift of Miss M. Lizzie Kenyon of Richmond. This is an ancient map, or survey of the Stanton Purchase, within the boundaries of which Miss Kenyon has spent her life, upon land acquired by a Peterson ancestor, her great-great-grandfather, over two hundred years ago. By her father's purchase of the Stanton farm adjoining, she is also the owner of land occupied for many generations by descendants of Robert Stanton, one of the original purchasers from the Indian Wannumachon.

The old map, drawn in ink upon thick parchment, yellow with age, measures fifteen by twenty-four inches. It has apparently always been tightly rolled and kept within the iron ring encircling it when it was presented to the Society. It is illustrated in the July 1935 issue of the COLLECTIONS.

A description of the map, written beneath it, reads as follows:

A Draught of a Neck of Land between Bever River and Awooscopauge River Belonging to Jno Stanton & Joseph Gardner Containing 4116 Acres More or Less besides the 200 Acres to Joseph Clark and the Undivided Medow as twas Surveyed In March 1693-4 att their Request with others with them, Concerned,

pre Me John Smith Surveyor
Drawn by A Scale of 80 Rods to an inch p. J. S.
A True Coppey Taken of the OReginal
Drawn by John Smith Surveyor
By Me ye 5th 5mo Calle July

Below this description a paper scale is attached, headed:

S ..... Easton Surveyor 173-.
(Samuel ? 1735-?)

This map, then, drawn in 1735 exhibits the Purchase as surveyed in 1693-4 and shows that its principal owners were, at that time, Daniel Stanton, John Stanton, Benjamin Green, Joseph Gardner, the Heir of Marthe Barber, Daniel Long Bottom and Henry Tippits (?). There were also four unassigned lots north of Benjamin Green's portion.

The Undivided Meadow and Joseph Clarke's 200 Acres lay at the extreme south-east and south, the entire Purchase having the Pawcatuck River as its southern boundary.

Joseph Clarke was the son of Joseph Clarke and the nephew of Dr. John Clarke, brothers who emigrated from England and settled in Aquidneck in 1638. They were mentioned in the Charter of 1663 which, indeed, Dr. John Clarke was largely instrumental in securing from His Majesty, Charles II. The second Joseph Clarke, owner of the 200 Acres, was the first town clerk of Westerly and held this position from 1669 to 1700.

A curious old book is extant in which Joseph Clarke entered the town records, attested by Joseph Pendleton, town clerk, on April 28, 1702, as a "Vera Coppia" of the records in the "old towne book."

As the town records filled only a portion of the thick, parchment-covered folio, Joseph Clarke and his descendants thriftily used the remaining pages for bookkeeping and other purposes. Thus it became a chronicle not only of the town meetings of old "Westerle" but also of the transactions of the Clarke family. In this book we find, "April 9, 1694, Voated—That whereas Joseph Clark Sen. had 2 hundered accers of land granted by the towne and it fell within the purchase of Robert Stanton and sd Clark petioned the towne that he might have his lot grante still according to lot: it is granted."

Joseph Clarke did not apparently find this sufficient to establish his right to the land in question, for on June 21,

1694, he secured by the payment of "ten pounds current money of New England" a deed to the 200 acres. This deed, still in existence, exhibits the stilted legal phraseology of the period. It states in part: "Wee the said John Stanton & Joseph Gardiner—Doe give grant Bargaine Sell Alien Enfeoff and Confirme unto the Said Joseph Clarke his heirs and assigns forever the Southwestward part of a Neck of land Scittuate lying in the Narragansett Cuntry between a River Cald Awooscopaug River and a River Cald Bever River the which said South west part of Said Neck Contains two hundred Acres More or Less as is now laid out And Diliniated on the Drauft of Said Neck And bounded Southwardly on the great River Comonly Caled pawcatuck River, Westwardly on said Bever River Northerly And Esterly on Lands belonging to Said John Stanton & being part of Said Neck,; the which Said Neck of land Was formerly purchased of Wanamachin Sachim & owner thearof by Robert Stanton father of Said John Stanton And George Gardiner father of Said Joseph Gardiner."

This deed was signed and witnessed in the presence of Benedict Arnold, and recorded June 24, 1694, in the "towne book" by Joseph Clarke.

On January 4, 1717, Joseph Clarke executed a deed reading, "To my son Samuel Clarke 200 acres in Westerly bounded by the Pawcatuck, and west by Beaver River, north and east by land formerly of John Stanton and Joseph Gardiner, which tract has been improved upwards of 21 years by my son Samuel, he being in actual possession of same for term aforesaid"

Samuel Clarke was made justice of the peace. A leaf attached by pins to Joseph Clarke's book contains the records of ten marriages performed by him between November 1724 and October 1729. He is thought to have built the house now standing on the estate of Mrs. Fred W. Marvel at the foot of School House Hill, near Beaver River.

The family genealogy of this branch of the Clarke family is as follows:

Joseph Clarke 1642-3 — 1726-7
|
Samuel Clarke 1672 — 1769
|
Joseph Clarke 1705 — 1783
|
Samuel Clarke Died 1792 | Joshua Clarke 1733 — 1818
|
Samuel Clarke 1771 — 1851

Mrs. Marvel is the great-granddaughter of the last named Samuel Clarke. He inherited the estate of his uncle, Samuel Clarke, who died childless, and finally possessed over 500 acres of land, the greater part lying within the Stanton Purchase. For many years a justice of the peace, he was generally known as Squire Clarke.

The original 200 acres of Joseph Clarke finally passed into the hands of strangers. In 1773 on September 14, Christopher Champlin "purchased of Joseph Clarke of Richmond One Hundred and fifty acres of Land being a part of said Clarke's Homestead Farm lying in said Richmond" and signed an agreement stating that the said Joseph Clarke and his family should "forever have liberty to Bury their Dead on said Farm at the common Burying Place, without any Molestation."

This burial place, which defines the location of the Champlin purchase as within the 200 acres, may be seen as one approaches the village of Kenyon from the north, on the right hand side of the South County Trail.

In an unfenced field, under a large oak are several graves in the neglected grass, indicated by rough blocks of field stone. One is marked S. C. It is probably the grave of Samuel Clarke who died in 1769. Two bear inscriptions, which may be deciphered thus:

Joshua Clarke
Died December 27, 1818
85 yr. 7 mos

Dorcas Clarke Died
Sept. 28, 1811
Age 69, 8 mos.

The fact that these two graves were thus marked may be due to a clause in the will of Joshua Clarke, drawn in 1815.

"I order my Excutor to git two tombstones for Me and my wife with our name and age ingraven on them."

The part of the 200 acres bordering upon the Pawcatuck is now the site of Kenyon, which became a prosperous mill village during the nineteenth century through the successful management of Elijah Kenyon. Upon the main street stands a beautiful colonial house, said to have been built by members of the Clarke family in 1735.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Marchant family acquired over 500 acres in the heart of the Stanton Purchase, on what was known as the Great Plain. Henry Marchant, first district judge of Rhode Island, had in 1775 bought a farm of 75½ acres bordering on the Usquepaug River in South Kingstown; a year later, 118 acres across the river in Richmond. His son, Judge William Marchant, inherited this land. In 1803 Joseph Durfee sold to William Marchant for $1,600 land in Richmond purchased by Durfee from Hopson Willcox, bounded easterly by Uskapaug River, southerly and westerly by land of Ichabod Peterson and Robert Stanton, northerly by Peter Boss and William Marchant, a highway running through said farm.

A map drawn of this region previous to the year 1825 shows the holdings of William Marchant, Ichabod Peterson, John Stanton, Perry Watson, Peter Boss, and the Herrington and Hoxie families, west of the river, and the farms of Marchant, Tanner, Clarke, Willcox, and Babcock east of the river, in South Kingstown.

The house then owned by Perry Watson still stands at the top of the hill beyond the home of Miss Kenyon—the old Peterson farm. It later came into the possession of Peter Clarke, son of Peter Clarke of Shannock Hill,

descendant of William Clarke, one of the original settlers of the Shannock Purchase.

Beyond the Perry Watson house to the south stood the Boss Meeting House. The Baptist society owning this place of worship was organized in 1773 by nine men and ten women, who met in private homes for several years. Their communion set consisted of two "puter" platters and two beaker glasses. Elder Boss preached to the little congregation. In 1787, on a lot of land containing half an acre, deeded by Perry Watson and his wife for £1: 10, a modest edifice 36 by 28 feet, without a steeple, was built for $310. In 1809 there were eighty members, the deacons being John Stanton, Wait Clarke, and Gardiner Moore.

The organization, though often without a pastor, prospered, especially under the ministration of the Rev. John H. Baker, son-in-law of Judge Marchant, also one of its staunch supporters. The worshippers usually came to church on horse back, if not on foot. Two services were held, necessitating the bringing of noon day lunches, which were often taken to the Peterson home and there enjoyed, accompanied by neighborhood gossip.

In 1855 a new church was erected in Charlestown near Clarke's Mills, and the old building soon existed only in memory.

A quarter of a century ago the Reverend Warren Dawley, who now owns the Perry Watson house, bought the meeting house lot for $5. In cutting down oak trees which stood upon it, he found iron hitching rings imbedded in the wood. Within the lot are two graves, and just outside, over the wall, another, reputed to be that of a suicide unworthy of burial in holy ground.

Beyond the Meeting House at the fork of the two roads, near Stanton's Corners, stood the community school house, which gave School House Hill its name. It was built by Samuel Clarke in 1812 and was used for school purposes until it was outgrown. In 1844 a new school house was built in District Number 3 across Beaver River, and the

old building was moved to the farm of Samuel Clarke, where it is still standing in a good state of preservation. The Reverend James R. Irish, who was schoolmaster here in 1828-9, mentions among his pupils Abiel and Elijah Kenyon, Perry Clarke, Charles and Simeon P. Clarke—founders of Clarke's Mills—Mary Clarke, daughter of Samuel Clarke, Harriet Stanton, and Daniel Marchant, a colored lad.

Opposite the Meeting House was the Stanton Farm. The dwelling house, reached by a wide and grassy lane bordered by locust trees, lingers in memory as a quiet and pleasant retreat remote from the road, with a charming view of the valley beyond. Fire visited it many years ago, and weeds and bushes now grow over the stones of the fallen chimney and cellar wall.

Near the ruins of the Stanton House is the Stanton burial lot, hidden among forest trees which have crept over once fertile meadows and would have encroached upon this spot had it not been kept open by Miss Kenyon.

In the center of a grassy space are nineteen graves. A marble stone bears the inscription:

John Stanton
Died Jan. 22, 1762
Aged 89

His Father
John Stanton
Died in Newport 1728
Aged 83

His Grandfather
Robert Stanton
Died at Newport 1672
Aged 73

His First Wife
Elizabeth
Died at Newport 1730
Aged 50

His Last Wife
Susannah
Died at Richmond 1807
Aged 92
Erected by B. Stanton, a
Great-Grandson, in 1841

Two slate stones are inscribed

In Memory of
Deacon John Stanton
who died Dec. 31
1842
In his 81 st year

In Memory of
Mary Stanton
Wife of
John Stanton
who died Sept. 18, 1841
in the 75 year of her age.

The remaining stones are not marked.

The Stanton house in the years of its decline was occupied by Giffey Marchant and her son Daniel. Giffey, an ancient dame, turbaned and bent, was an object of wonder and awe among children; but Daniel was beloved by all who knew him, and served faithfully on farms where he was constantly employed as a spare hand. He was a descendant of a freed slave, Abraham, once belonging to Judge Marchant, and a freed slave woman who had belonged to Samuel Clarke. Abraham Marchant lived on an island in Great Swamp, called to this day "Abraham's Island." The ruins of the bridge by which it was reached are still visible. Daniel was brought up in the home of Samuel Clarke and was the playfellow and schoolmate of Samuel Clarke's grandson. For some reason this humble workman is better remembered than men of means and position, and many anecdotes about him are still recollected in the places where he was once known.

In the cemetery on the estate of Mrs. Marvel, where the nineteenth century Clarkes are buried, are several graves, probably of the family slaves. One is marked by a stone on which is crudely cut—G. M. Died Feb. 16, 1884 Ag 91. This stone was lettered by a kindly neighbor in the presence of those who had assembled to honor Giffey Marchant and her son Daniel. He was soon after laid to rest in a nameless grave at her side.

Ancient landmarks are slowly but surely disappearing within the Stanton Purchase. A few old houses, some tumble-down walls and rotting fences, cellar-holes near which the lilacs bloom in May, and the last resting places of those long dead, alone remain to tell us of the passage of time since Wannumachon sold the birthright of his people to white men.

Ships' Protests, 1697–1700

(Continued from page 79)

These are to Certifie . . . that this day appeared before mee david Campanall of Newport in the Collony of Rhoad Island . . . marrinr who together with Peter Raymand of New York & Henry Johnson with Marke Moss all of the City of New yorke Imbarked in the providence[13] Sloope of Rhoad Island David Campanill Above Sd Commander And being bound for this port of Newport & being betwene New haven & this place the Storme Arose And Sea Rune in greatt Stress of weather over us our terpallen being Layd in So much that wee had 14 or 15 Inches of water in the hold to the greatt damage of marchants goods is on borde.
Signed in presence of us

Peter Raymand
Protest noted Nov. 16, 1697. Henry Johnson
Mark X Moss (II, 61)

[13]One of the earliest boats named for the Town of Providence.

Newport in Rhoad Island octobr 6th 1698
. . . wee Daniell Hempson master of the good Sloope the Speedwell of new yorke david Campanall marr & Benj. Cranston passanger waying Anchor the 17th day of Septembr Last bound from the Above Sd port of New Yorke . . . To the porte of Boston . . . Laden with tobacko upon fraight being marchants goods & by gods providence meatting with contrary winds & Stress of waves particulurly on the 26th day of the 7ber: being then in the Sound & Against Bradford[14] with the Riger of the Storme & Seas wee Springe a Leake & ware forsed for the Safty of our Lives & goods to putt into Sd Bradford And Have Ever Sence Continued at the pumpe glas & glasse[15] untill our Arrivall in this port of Newport the 5th of octobr 1698 And may by reason of what is Afore premiced Indge[16] tht thare is damage done to the marchants goods on bord Sd Sloope to the truth heare of wee have taken our Sollom Engagments[17] & Sett to our hands . . .

Daniell Hunson
David Campanall[18]
Benj. Cranston (II, 79)

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[14]Branford, Conn.

[15]"glass and glass" means "watch after watch," that is, continuously.

[16]Injury.

[17]Ebenezer Slocum and Rebecca Clark signed as witnesses.

[18]Was David Campanall a relative of Abraham Campanall, the Newport Jew? See R. I. Col. Rec. III, 243; and Rider's *Book Notes*, vol. XXII, p. 98 et als.

The Date of Roger Williams' Birth

The date of the birth of Roger Williams is not known. In his writings we find six references to his age.

1. In an undated letter,[1] which from its context must have been written between July and October 1632, he describes himself as "nearer upwards of 30 than 25," by which he appears to mean that he was nearer 30 than 25; that is over 27½, and hence born not later than the early part of 1605.

2. In this letter[2] he also wrote of having been "persecuted even in and out of my father's house these 20 years." This is not a very definite statement, but it might well be assumed that a child would be at least five before he was persecuted for his religious beliefs or his lack of them. This would seem to indicate that Roger Williams was born before 1607.

3. The third reference chronologically in regard to his age was recently discovered by Mr. G. Andrews Moriarty in a hitherto unpublished deposition on file in the Town Clerk's office at Portsmouth, R. I. It states that Roger Williams was about 56 in 1662 which would indicate that he was born about 1606, or in fact any time in 1605, 1606 or 1607, for the word *about* makes the statement vague.

The deposition is as follows:

[Endorsed] Mr Roger Williams his testimony about Hogge Island

Providence the 15th of November 1662. The Testimony of Mr Roger Williams of Providence aged about 56 yeares is as follows: I testifie in the holy presence of God that whereas divers of our Neighbours of Rhode Island treated with the Governor of Plimouth Mr Bradford & the Magis-

[1]Narra. Club. vol. VI, p. 2.
[2]idem.

trates about a Plantation at Souwams they declared to us in the name of their Colloney in the Governors house in Plimouth that they could not part with souwames for they reserved it for & desighned it of old for themselves but if their Countrey men (aforesayd) would please to purchase Acquednicke now called Rhoade Island with the litle Islands about it they should lay no claime therunto but they should bee glad of their full acomodation & Neighbourhood, and they never in the least made any exception of the litle Island called Hogge Island and therefore or friendes of Portsmouth imediately upon their first plantinge & ever since possessed & enjoyed it.

2. When I being interpreter treated with Miantonomu about acomodatinge of my friendes with Rhode Island hee was exceedinge willinge & free that they should have all possible acomodation within his power which was supreame at that time over Ousamaquin & this whole Bay, and hee often sayd to mee that they should injoy the litle Ilandes about Acquednicke as well as Acquednicke it selfe.

3. At that time (as well as before) Ousamaquin confessed to mee hee was subject to the Narrogansets and was expresly sent to by Miantonomu to further all hee could this Plantation at Acquednicke, and Ousamaquin did often in my hearinge & to my selfe declare his willinge and free consent that Rhode Islandmen should injoy the litle Island called Hogge Island [as] well as Rhoade Island it selfe Taken upon Oath or ingadgement before mee the day and yeare abovesayd John Greene Ge[ll] Asistant.

The above written is entred and Recorded in page (412) in the Town Book belonging to the town of Portsmouth pr me John Anthony Town Clerke.

4. In 1676 he wrote[3] "from my childhood (now above three score years)", which would make his childhood before 1616 and his birth presumably as early as 1606.

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[3]George Fox Digged out of his Burrows. N. C. vol. V, p. (unnumbered) 1xiv. In original page a3.

5. In February 1677/8 he called himself "aged about seventie five years,"[4] which would make him born about 1602/3 which being in round numbers might mean any time from 1601 to 1605.

6. In July 1679 he said[5] he was "now neare Foure score years", by which he would probably mean that he was between 70 and 80, and indicates his birth as between 1601 and 1609.

The five *later* statements, although only approximate, are in harmony with the period indicated by the first statement.

From his own statements, then, it would appear that he was born not later than the early part of 1605. On the other hand Roger Williams was elected a scholar of the Charter-House school 25 June 1621 and as, according to the regulations, boys over 14 were not admitted, it would seem to follow that Roger Williams was born not earlier than the latter part of 1606 in which case he might still be considered as "fourteen" until he reached his fifteenth birthday anniversary.

Straus,[6] taking the Charter-House evidence as a basis, argues that Williams must have been under 14 in June 1621 and so born in 1607. He interprets "nearer upwards of 30 then 25" as "another way of saying he was over 25 and under 30, or nearer to 30 than 25 is to 30 which would agree with his date of birth in 1607; that is to say, he was between 25 and 26 years of age."

This Charter-House evidence, which places his birth as not earlier than June 1606, and his own statement which makes him born not later than July 1605 seem irreconcilable.

It does not seem likely that Williams could have made a mistake in his age in 1632, while it is very possible that

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[4]R. I. H. S. Pub. VIII, p. 156.

[5]R. I. Col. Rec. III, 57; R. I. H. S. Coll. III, 166.

[6]Roger Williams by Oscar S. Straus p. 11.

through the influence of Coke, the age rule of the Charter-House was extended or even waived in Williams' case.

Mr. H. S. Wright, Secretary of the Charter-House writing 9 Jan. 1916 states that the Governors' order of 28 June 1619 was that no scholar "be admitted or received but that he shalbe between tenn and fourteene yeares of age," but Mr. Wright adds that exceptions were sometimes made.

The Benoni Waterman family bible[7] contains an item written by Benoni Waterman many years after Roger Williams' death which states that "Roger Williams was born in Wales in 1599". This item is recorded too late to be considered as pertinent to this discussion, but it seems to be the first record in writing of a family tradition, which though probably inaccurate, has been often quoted.

[7]In library of Rhode Island Historical Society.

New Publications of Rhode Island Interest

"*The Gilbert Stuart Birthplace.* A brief History of the Birthplace, its Purchase and Restoration, the forming of the Corporation and Future Projects," by Caroline Hazard, has been published as an illustrated pamphlet of 21 pages.

The New England Quarterly for June 1935 contains an article on "The Library of an Eighteenth Century Gentleman of Rhode Island" (Henry Marchant), by Susan Stanton Brayton.

A History of the Blackstone Canal by Zelotes W. Coombs appears in the April 1935 issue of *The Worcester Historical Society Publications.*

The Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society for January 1935 contains an article on the Touro Family of Newport by Morris A. Gutstein.

Irish Builders of Colonial Rhode Island is the title of a pamphlet of 12 pages by Richard J. Purcell.

The American Genealogist for July 1935 contains an article on the early generations of the Lake family in Rhode Island by G. Andrews Moriarty.

Notes

Mr. Denison W. Greene has been elected to membership in the Society.

Chief Big Thunder:

A Problematic Figure in Rhode Island Annals

By Edmund B. Delabarre

The astounding career of P. T. Barnum was a striking illustration of people's delight in harmless humbug. Most of us like the seeming magic of sleight-of-hand performances, especially if, after enjoying the creepy thrill of them, we can discover later just how the illusion was produced. It is something of that type which is to engage our present attention. A romantic-sounding character made brief contact with Rhode Island history some seventy-five years ago. He was described in a manner that left a glamour of marvel and mystery about him. For the sake of their dramatic appeal, his picturesque pretensions almost ought to have been true. Carefully conducted impartial investigation does not seem to permit us to believe in them. It will be a diverting task to follow the example of a book by

David P. Abbott called *Behind the Scenes with Mediums*, and set forth first the first-hand tricky appearances, and then the facts which lie behind them.

General Guy M. Fessenden, and later Miss Virginia Baker, introduced us many years ago to the remarkable Indian personality about whom we are inquiring. Their tale left us with an impression of his wonderful possessions, discoveries and abilities. During the course of my own researches about the possible origin of the rock-inscription near Mount Hope, some years ago, I considered him for a short time as a doubtful candidate for the honor of having made the carving. Soon after, I decided positively against this possibility. But even if he could have had nothing to do with this particular mystery, as became clearly evident, still he remained an inviting problem in himself. Accordingly, I made exhaustive inquiries about him, and was fortunate enough to secure much reliable information from many sources.*

The larger knowledge thus gained, I feel, ought not to be lost through being left unrecorded. So I have thought it well to assemble my notes about this unusual case, and to introduce Francis Loring, Chief Big Thunder, anew to a Rhode Island audience. I shall let Miss Baker first tell about him and his exploits, and then try to see what truth lies in the story. Although we shall find our hero, as some of my correspondents express it, "an untruthful and untrustworthy old rascal," yet his big pretensions make at least an appealing fairy-tale which is worth relating. The whole story as it existed prior to my own inquiries was given in 1904 by Miss Baker, as follows:

"After the close of Philip's war, the remnant of the Wampanoags fled to Maine, and ultimately became merged

*My gratitude is due especially to Miss Baker, Mrs. Fannie Hardy Eckstorm of Brewer, Maine, and Dr. Frank G. Speck of the University of Pennsylvania. All of them were exceedingly patient and helpful in answering the many queries which I addressed to them. Quotations from them which follow herein are from correspondence conducted in 1920.

in the Penobscot tribe. Up to half a century ago, parties of Penobscot Indians were in the habit of making periodical visits to Warren, camping for several days in various parts of the town. . . . The following article, contributed by Gen. Guy M. Fessenden, appeared in the *Warren Telegraph* issue of June 2, 1860. . . . 'Mr. Francis Loring, an intelligent Indian, and a member of the Penobscot tribe, who has been in this vicinity for several weeks, informed the writer that the tribe had in their possession, and which they carefully preserved among their national archives, an ancient book made of skins, containing many descriptions of important historical localities, some of which are in this vicinity, all of them in the ancient Indian style of signs and picture writing. One of these pictures represents four men rolling a heavy circular stone, by a stick placed through a hole in the centre, back and forth over a quantity of corn, and described as the Wampanoag national grinding mill, where corn was ground for war parties or for any large public gathering of the people. The locality of the place was so plainly stated that Mr. Loring had no difficulty in finding it. It is at the place called King's Rocks in Warren, near the Swansea line about two miles from the village.' "

Miss Baker's account states further that from another picture in the book Mr. Loring located, near Wigwam Hill, a mile east of the grinding place, an Indian cemetery. She continues: "Mr. Francis Loring, known also by the name 'Big Thunder,' is now living, at an advanced age, on Indian Old Town Island, Maine, and is the custodian of the Penobscot tribe. The writer recently learned from him that the 'ancient book made of skins' . . . was, a few years ago, accidentally destroyed by fire."*

From my talks and correspondence with Miss Baker, I gained a very high regard for her intelligence and good judgment. In fact, in the above account she merely related a remarkable story as it came to her. That she did not credit

*Virginia Baker, Massasoit's Town; Sowams in Pokanokit. Its History, Legends and Traditions. 1904.

it fully is evidenced by the fact that, as we shall see, she gathered further details about this marvelous person but did not publish them because she was not satisfied about their reliability. None of us alone can arrive at the whole truth. Personally, like her, I would have liked to believe that there was such a pictographic record of Wampanoag history as Loring claimed and she described, if only there were good grounds for the belief; just as I would have liked to believe that a truly remarkable stone tablet said to have been found near Taunton was a genuine record of long-ago conflicts of Indians with mammoths and a pictographic portrayal of the wanderings of Algonkian Indians throughout a long series of successive generations.* I find no warrant for accepting either of them as authentic.

Even so, if in the end we must class most of Big Thunder's pretensions in the category of deliberate inventions, still they do not lose a certain charm and attractiveness. If they lack historical veracity, they may nevertheless properly appeal as a pleasing work of fiction. Only, to enjoy them as such, we must know that that is what they are. So we pass from wish-fulfilling myth and mystery to an examination of what we can discover about the truth.

The very first statement which I have quoted from Miss Baker is in need of revision. Her impression that "the remnant of the Wampanoags merged with the Penobscot tribe" was derived from fallible local tradition. We know on good evidence that some members of the tribe surely fled somewhere, and it may well have been to Maine. While granting this, persons who know the Penobscots well assure me that there is no proof of any real "merging" of the two tribes, and that in any case it cannot have been important enough in amount or consequences to have served as a sound basis for Loring's claims. Though he told people in Warren that he was of Wampanoag descent, and was "custodian of the national archives" of that tribe, we shall find reason to reject such statements.

*These *Collections*, 1925, vol. 18, pp. 55ff.

There is no doubt, however, that Penobscots did visit Warren, probably several times earlier and certainly in 1860; just as they often went to other places, as far distant sometimes as Philadelphia, in the summer-time, "for trade and a good time." Loring was certainly a member of their party in 1860. He was described by Miss Baker's aunt, who saw him there, as "a very handsome man, over six feet tall, very dignified and modest in appearance." The only further details about him which I have seen in print are in a clipping from the *Boston Sunday Globe*, probably of some date in 1904. It shows a photograph of him, speaks of his being six feet four inches tall, and gives further information which I condense as follows: "His father died when he was an infant and little is known of his history. His mother was a doctress of the tribe, and practiced medicine in Boston and Portland. She died in Portland July 4, 1833. He was then a lad of 12, youngest of eight children. After she died, he and his sisters began making baskets for a living. They traveled as far as New York and Philadelphia, where they met Barnum, with whom they remained for eight months. He married three times and had eight children."

This would seem to fix the year of his birth as 1821, which agrees closely with his own statement in 1860 that he was then forty years old. But a dispatch from Oldtown, Maine, dated April 7, 1906, published in the *Boston Globe*, stated that Old Big Thunder died on that day, at the age of 79. This is more nearly in accord with the results of inquiries by Mrs. Eckstorm. She could not discover the exact truth, and says that Indians habitually add a few years in giving their age. Her best calculations fit fairly the implication of this 1906 assertion, for she arrives at the conclusion that he was born sometime about 1824 to 1827. His parentage as well as his age is not so certain as was assumed in the news-item cited above, which seems also to have understated his marital status. An Indian woman who had known him, in commenting upon this matter, remarked

that he had had eight "wives," of all nationalities and all colors "from ebony to pea-green."

His name is variously given; in recent years at least most commonly as Francis Loring, Chief Big Thunder. Speck suggests that his claim to Wampanoag descent was untrue, and that Loring may be an old Penobscot family name, spelled Loron in early documents, possibly derived from the French "Laurent," a common Indian family name. George Hunt, formerly for many years Indian agent at Oldtown, wrote to me in 1920 that he had always supposed Frank Loring to be a Penobscot Indian, and that the older Indians there knew nothing about any Wampanoags joining the Penobscots at any time. In connection with what we are to discover shortly about his character, this certainly suggests that Loring made up the story for its picturesque effect at Warren. Mrs. Eckstorm, who has had a long and intimate acquaintance with the Penobscots, says that until recently he had always been known at Oldtown, not as Loring, but as "Big Frank Lola."

He never had a bona fide Indian name;—"the Penobscots have lost the practice of native naming since conversion to Christianity," writes Dr. Speck. There is some uncertainty about the source of the other name by which he was familiarly known, "Chief Big Thunder." The "Chief" part seems to have been his own invention. I have reliable information that he never was a chief. It has been suggested that the "Big Thunder" part was conferred upon him because of his preposterous stories. But it seems that it goes back of that. Mrs. Eckstorm has probably hit upon the actual source of it. She has an old circus poster which leaves date and place to be filled in in writing, and announces that a troupe of actors and actresses of a tribe from west of the Rocky Mountains is to give an exhibition "under the direction of the Famous Indian Prophet Big Thunder." The particular one of these posters which she has announces a performance in Brewer, Maine, year not stated but probably about 1855. The actual exhibitors there, as she knows

from a trustworthy source, were Francis Lola and two nephews (or cousins). She surmises that Lola had traveled with the original troupe, had swiped a lot of the handbills, "and then had the face to come back to this town, where they were known to everyone, and show these circulars stating that they came from 'west of the Rocky Mountains.' My father (Manly Hardy) used to say that Big Thunder took his name from this circus program. As it unquestionably was printed for some other 'prophet' than he, I should say he stole the name, and the tribe let him keep it as a huge joke."

This was doubtless not his only venture in the circus business. There is no reason to doubt the statement that he was with Barnum for a time in his early youth. He once told George Hunt that he had traveled with Barnum's shows for twenty years, all over the country. The *Globe*, however, boils down this exaggeration to a mere eight months. Barnum makes no reference to him in his published reminiscences, although he does speak of having been "in the habit of engaging parties of American Indians from the far West to exhibit at the Museum," for many years previous to 1864.* In the midst of his vast array of other "unsurpassed curiosities," our Big Thunder made too little individual impression upon him to be singled out for special mention. How long their actual relationship lasted we have no means of knowing. Evidently it was long enough to give Loring some useful training in preparation for his later career.

About Loring's character, apart from the impression he made at Warren, I find absolutely undeviating agreement. A few quotations from my correspondence will suffice to make this clear. One of the mildest of them is this: "He was quite a character, and had many virtues. He had failings, however, and one of them was a certain exaggeration or amplification that sometimes shot wide of the truth."

*P. T. Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs, 1874, p. 573.

Others remark, practically unanimously, that he was a picturesque and unrestrained liar. "No one who knew him would believe a word he said. He must have told some truth; but it takes an expert to sort out his stuff, and any claims that he ever made for himself are so sure to be false that they are not worth arguing over." "He would have been willing to claim that he was Philip re-incarnated if the idea had struck him; and he would have acted the part, too! What he said about himself would not matter in the least." It was mostly "stuff and nonsense" that he narrated. "There was no odor of sanctity about old Big Thunder. The old fellow was held in little esteem by his tribesmen, and it was all he deserved." These seem to be entirely impartial and reliable estimates of his prevailing characteristics, and we shall find them further exemplified in what follows. He was a natural show-man, a little Barnum, and he made his living out of it.

The most intriguing thing to us Rhode Islanders in the story of his adventures in Warren is that mysterious "book of skins" which was said to depict important features of the history of the Wampanoags. It would have been a priceless possession for preservation among our State's historical treasures, if authentic and procurable. But we are well prepared now to estimate the value of the assertions which he made about it. The most detailed description of it extant is in the manuscript note-book of Miss Baker, from which she permitted me to make an excerpt. It must not be inferred that she trusted the story without reservation. Although it appealed to her as something that would be important and absorbingly interesting if true, yet she did not put faith enough in it to be willing to publish it without surer knowledge. She gave me permission, however, to use it if I saw fit, and I am certain that she would have approved of its inclusion in this present setting. The pertinent passage is dated 1903, and relates the result of an investigation made for her by a friend who had been to Indian Old Town

Island and had had an interview with Big Thunder. Her account of it follows:

"He (Big Thunder) told all about the ancient 'book of skins' referred to by Gen. Fessenden. It was burned, as the Indian agent wrote me several years ago. The book, for many years, was believed to be made of skins, but it was discovered that the so-called skins were really sheets of birch bark cured in a way that made them look like skins. Big Thunder showed a piece of bark prepared in the same way, and one could not tell it from a skin. This ancient book was a sort of chart or record of localities in Warren, Bristol, and part of Providence. By it Big Thunder located King's Rocks, King Philip's Chair, the Indian Burial Place on Edward Mason's farm on the Big Swamp Road, and other Indian localities. Big Thunder said that in the chart was a picture of a niche in the side of a hill with an Indian seated in it shooting at a head-dress set up on a rock at some distance ahead of him. The meaning of this picture is that King Philip used to practice marksmanship by shooting the feathers off the head-dress. The niche was King Philip's Chair at Mount Hope. The chart showed that near this Chair there was wampum buried. Big Thunder dug and unearthed a collar of purple and white beads. It was shaped to fit the neck, the groundwork being of the purple beads with a sort of vine-like design of white. Big Thunder as custodian of the tribe had the collar. He keeps it in an old cracked blue pitcher."

There seems to be here some evidence that Big Thunder's story about the book had grown somewhat in the interval since he had told it to Fessenden 43 years before. All my informants are very skeptical about this peculiar book. For one thing, no one can be found who ever saw it, whether Fessenden in 1860, or anyone later! It may have existed, or may not. Even if it did, as one person expresses it, "he may have made it himself, and burned part or all of it. Indians are apt to hoax nice people this way when they think their victims are gullible and eager." The value of

Loring's word for it we have probed already. Another correspondent observes rightly that so far as its contents have been described it would be a very queer sort of book for Indians to preserve—why should they wish to have charts of ancient cornmills and graveyards? Loring was wandering about in the vicinity of Warren "for several weeks," and no chart would have been needed to help him find the places which he located. It cannot possibly have revealed the burial place of the collar described: "collars of wampum thirty years ago were common on Oldtown Island and Big Thunder probably got his beads there; no collar woven of wampum could last long in the ground." Moreover, "there is no such thing as 'keeper of the records of the tribe.' " And finally, a well-informed local Indian had never heard of the existence of such a book. It seems to have been invented by our gifted deceiver especially to appeal to a Rhode Island audience.

When I first heard of it, I naturally was eager to learn everything possible about it, and to discover whether there was any chance at all that it might have been an authentic pictographic source-book of local Indian history. Such things are not unknown. The Lenni Lenape (Delawares) had a pictographic Walam Olum, outlining the history of their migrations; and B. Perley Poore found in the French archives an "Indian Hieroglyphic Picture Book," the "Livre des Sauvages," written about 1680.* After such reports as I have now related, all my hopes in this direction were completely shattered. The outcome, nevertheless, leaves us with a still quaint texture of pleasing inventions to console us for the lack of historical veridity. Our "custodian of the tribe" naturally had other treasures to show to interested visitors. What can be learned about these throws further light on the general nature of his pretensions and is worth placing on record. I have two lists of them, one recorded by Miss Baker in 1903, the other noted down by

*E. B. Delabarre, Dighton Rock, 1928, pp. 177, 272, 278.

Mrs. Eckstorm in 1901. The latter says that at the time of her visit he displayed a birch bark sign reading: "Big Thunder, Indian relics and Indian traditions told." Both remark that he kept the articles in a box or trunk under his bed. There is not a single identifiable article that is the same in the two lists, unless those which I have numbered 1 and 2 are the same in both cases. Apparently he sold them when he could, and kept changing them and his stories about them to suit the interests of his particular hearers. It was his business to sell relics with interesting stories attached to them. One list, together with the tale of the mythical pictographic book, has the appearance of having been designed for Rhode Island consumption especially. The other and earlier one has nothing in it reminiscent of that design. Miss Baker's list of the treasures is as follows:

1. A knife given by the Mohawks to the Penobscots.
2. The collar of wampum described above, used at marriage ceremonies.
3. An iron hatchet given by King Philip to the Penobscots, the first iron hatchet ever owned by the tribe. (But see a later story about King Philip's axe.)
4. An iron tomahawk given to the tribe by King Philip.
5. A pestle which Big Thunder found at King's Rocks.
6. A red sandstone peace-pipe obtained from the Cherokees.
7. The war-bow of the tribe. Very curious. String of caribou hide.

Mrs. Eckstorm's list, of two years earlier, is longer:

1. Scalping knife taken from the Mohawks when they were beaten by the Penobscots! A very curious, long knife, very long narrow blade inlaid with bright metal, color of brass, and with an engraved brass handle riveted in pieces upon the steel handle. Apparently French make.
2. A piece beaded with purple wampum edged with white, beads set on diagonal lines, piece about 2 by 8 inches, buckskin fringes.

3. Strings of purple wampum.

4. Necklace of points of caribou hoofs.

5. Necklace of bear's claws with a "medal of human bone."

6. Small silver brooches from 2 to 4 inches in diameter, without ornament.

7. Two powder horns, one ancient.

8. Some stone tools, knife, axe, etc., in handles.

9. Flint and steel.

10. Scalping knife (after the pattern of Col. Bowie!) 'used by the Spaniards in the massacre of Indians at Pemaquid!' A heavy, rusty knife with wood handle covered apparently with snake skin or shark skin scraped thin.

11. Various tomahawks of bloody history, and bludgeons of modern make.

12. Pictures of Molly Molasses 'at the age of 110, wearing her widow's cap.' (Molly was never married; died aged 92.)

13. The relics sent by Queen Isabella to Mrs. Polis, mother of Joseph Polis, wife of a chief!! (a) A silver 'crown'—otherwise a silver hat-band. This was a flexible belt of silver, thin, not very heavy, about 3 inches wide, chased in lines like one of our brooches and with a line of openwork holes near the top. (b) Several strings of glass beads, blue and garnet, small size but good color. (c) Gold ear-rings, diamond ring, and autograph letter (these last not seen; ring lost).

14. The game of bowls. This was undoubtedly very ancient. The bowl was a shallow disk of wood about 14 inches across, made, so Lola said, with stone tools and 200 years old. The counters were bone buttons about 1¼ inches across, plain one side and marked with a simple design of curved lines on the other. The game was, putting them in the bowl, to bring it down with a thump that would make the counters jump. If all fell one side up, it counted; if they fell heads and tails, it did not.

Through her intimate knowledge of Indians both here and in the West, Mrs. Eckstorm was able to catch old Lola in a number of untrue statements both about the relics and in general conversation. It is hardly necessary to relate them here, as we have instances enough to demonstrate his utter unreliability and unbridled imagination. She quotes one old Indian as saying: "You see, he never could bear to have anyone tell a bigger story than he could. He always had to 'over it.' " But there is one more illustration of his characteristic inability to stick to truth that is worth relating. Mrs. Eckstorm's brother had a guide, who told him once: "There was that d—d old rascal telling my mother that that was King Philip's axe that he used to kill our people; and it was the same old axe I had just found in Passadumkeag Rips at low water and given to him."

I cannot better close this study of a curious personality, whose reputed strange gifts and possessions turn out to be so tame and understandable, than by quoting again a passage from one of Dr. Speck's letters which I have published once before: "He was a 'show-man' in every sense of the term. He was a most unreserved liar and no secret was made of it among the Penobscot. His business was the deception of the public. He had a little relic shop on Indian Island where he sold 'ancient relics' which he manufactured, and I have encountered many stories and traditions which were his own invention. Among them must be included the 'ancient Book' hoax. In short, Big Thunder was a joke among all who knew the Indians."

Despite this unavoidable conclusion, Big Thunder was a 'picturesque old rascal,' who contributes to our entertainment if not to historical knowledge. It has been well worth while to have sought out the facts about him, as a one-time visitor to Rhode Island who created a teasing mystery and a flurry of interest and curiosity which the previously published accounts of him in Rhode Island literature have left unclarified.

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